

# What We Found:

Leveraging data & community insights  
to prevent gender-based violence  
in High River, Alberta



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This report is dedicated to the survivors of gender-based violence—those whose strength, resilience, and voices inspire change every day. Your experiences illuminate the urgent need for justice, protection, and systemic transformation that works to prevent violence before it starts.

We honour your courage in the face of harm and silence, and we commit this work to advancing a world where dignity, safety, and equality are not aspirations, but guarantees for all.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the University of Alberta's CARE Lab, especially Sarah Demedeiros and Nicole Orji, for their support with the project and research coordination, collaboration, supporting our partners, and assisting with the logistics and evaluation of the data walk.

*The Munroe Barn, the site of our community meetings and data walk, is located within Sheppard Family Park. This land was generously willed to the Town of High River in 1995 by Ruth Maccoy, with the hope that it would serve as a public park—a space where people could gather, connect, and enjoy the surroundings.*



*Each day, Ruth welcomed neighbours into her kitchen for tea and cookies, creating a place of warmth, community, and belonging. Today, the park continues her legacy. We honour Ruth for offering a space that not only celebrates the natural beauty and historical charm of High River but also supports our collective efforts in violence prevention and community well-being.*

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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We at Rowan House Society acknowledge that we have an important responsibility to respect the air, water and land and to acknowledge the history and the people that have lived here for thousands of years.

In the spirit of reconciliation, today we honour and acknowledge the history of the original people of this land, which includes the traditional territory of the peoples of the Treaty 7 region in southern Alberta, including the Blackfoot Nation Tribes of Siksika, Pikani, Kainai, the Stoney-Nakoda First Nation Tribes of Chiniki, Bearspaw and Wesley, and the Tsuut'ina First Nation.

We acknowledge all nations, Indigenous and non-Indigenous that live, work, and play on this land and who honour and celebrate this territory.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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High River, Alberta, is a community defined by care, connection, and resilience. In 2025, this spirit came to life as residents, leaders, and organizations united to prevent gender-based violence and foster a safer, more inclusive town. Rowan House Society led this effort through the Made-in-Alberta Primary Prevention Project,<sup>a</sup> convening diverse voices to explore local risk factors such as population growth, aging demographics, financial pressures, and entrenched gender roles. These factors affect power dynamics and increase vulnerability, particularly among marginalized groups like temporary foreign workers. Lessons from past crises, including the 2013 flood and COVID-19, reinforced the importance of resilience-building and early intervention.

Community priorities for prevention included engaging youth, raising awareness, reducing stigma, and involving men and boys through tailored outreach, while meeting people where they are—in schools, faith communities, and local networks. These insights now form the foundation of a collaborative roadmap to stop violence before it starts and build a future of safety, dignity, and belonging in High River.



Building on these insights, the following section outlines the **key findings and community priorities** that emerged through this community engagement process. It highlights the factors shaping risk in High River, the strategies identified to address them, and the collaborative actions proposed to develop a primary prevention to stop violence before it starts.

## HIGH RIVER IS A COMMUNITY ON THE CUSP OF CHANGE.

From population growth and aging demographics to increasing diversity, the data highlights the complex social dynamics shaping the town. These trends have significant implications for violence prevention efforts in terms of areas of focus and factors that must be considered for meaningful community-driven change.

High River and the surrounding area's agricultural economy, changing financial stressors, and entrenched gender roles influence not only daily life, but also the distribution of power, potentially limiting choices within families and relationships. These intersecting realities can normalize control, reinforce the idea that violence is private or a social norm, which can also discourage help-seeking behaviour early on.

<sup>a</sup>This project is a collaboration between Rowan House Society, Big Hill Haven, YWCA Banff, and Shift/University of Calgary.



For prevention to be meaningful in High River and the surrounding area, it must be grounded in these economic and social conditions—and challenge the norms that allow gender norms and gender-based violence to persist.

The lessons learned from past crises (such as the 2013 flood or COVID-19) serve as a powerful reminder of the strength, compassion, and resilience that define High River and the surrounding area, offering valuable insights for future efforts in preventing violence. Proactive, upstream interventions that focus on building resilience, such as mental health supports, economic stability measures, and accessible social services, can help individuals and families better cope with adversity.

Community conversations reinforced and expanded these findings. Participants discussed how changing demographics and a shifting social fabric in High River and surrounding agricultural areas have made the community less integrated and cohesive than it once was.

Economic pressures and hardships, especially around housing affordability and the cost of living, further add to these challenges. For more vulnerable members of the community, such as temporary foreign workers, these pressures are exacerbated by the need to send money back home while still affording life in High River. Together, these factors create the potential for increased risk of gender-based violence.

Participants highlighted prevention opportunities in High River and surrounding areas. Community members pointed to the potential to engage children and youth through school-based prevention initiatives. They recognized the need to increase public awareness of gender-based violence, addressing the stigma and silence surrounding the issue. They also saw potential in using technology to reach people, especially men and boys.

Overall, community members stressed the importance of a broader prevention effort focused on men and boys, including tailored programs and male-led discussions. Additionally, they identified the need to “meet people where they are,” connect with faith communities and social groups in High River, and better leverage both informal and formal community supports.

## NEXT STEPS: BUILDING A PRIMARY PREVENTION PLAN FOR HIGH RIVER AND AREA

High River and the surrounding communities are uniquely positioned to lead the way in preventing gender-based violence before it starts. With committed local leadership, engaged residents, and strong cross-sector partnerships, there is a foundation in place to co-create an effective, community-driven primary prevention plan focused on the following six recommendations:

**1****COLLECT MORE LOCAL DATA TO UNDERSTAND PATTERNS OF PERPETRATION TO INFORM PREVENTION EFFORTS**

Gather more detailed and localized data—especially with RCMP and stakeholders—to better understand gender-based violence perpetration patterns. This will help inform targeted, effective prevention and early intervention strategies.

**2****DEVELOP & SUPPORT MALE-FOCUSED PREVENTION INITIATIVES**

Develop programs that engage men in preventing gender-based violence perpetration by promoting emotional literacy, healthy relationships, and positive peer influence. Ideally, male champions should lead efforts in male-dominated spaces like sports teams and service clubs.

**3****IMPLEMENT A STRATEGIC, COORDINATED & WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION**

Implement a coordinated gender-based violence prevention strategy across all school levels. This includes aligning efforts between schools and community services, and ensuring continuity, inclusivity, and parent/community engagement in violence prevention education.

**4****LAUNCH A TARGETED OUTREACH INITIATIVE TO ENGAGE FAITH, SERVICE CLUBS & OTHER GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY GROUPS IN GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION**

Conduct proactive outreach to trusted community hubs (faith groups, service clubs, cultural groups, newcomers) to engage in gender-based violence efforts. Empower informal leaders and ensure culturally responsive support for newcomers is accessible.

**5****ENHANCE PUBLIC AWARENESS THROUGH CAMPAIGNS FOCUSED ON POSITIVE MESSAGING & DIGITAL OUTREACH**

Increase awareness through uplifting, stigma-reducing campaigns that promote healthy behaviours and relationships. Use digital platforms and relatable role models to reach youth and the wider community effectively.

**6****PARTNER WITH FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES IN A PARALLEL PROCESS FOR PREVENTION**

Build respectful, long-term partnerships with local First Nations to develop prevention strategies rooted in Indigenous knowledge and leadership. Embed reconciliation and cultural safety throughout all mainstream prevention initiatives.

To be effective, prevention strategies must not only be inclusive but also tailored to the unique needs and strengths of all those who live and work in High River and the area—including newcomers, temporary workers, Indigenous residents, young people, seniors, and people of diverse faiths.

By engaging with and learning from the lived experiences of those who call High River and the surrounding areas home, we can build a more inclusive, responsive, and resilient community where all feel welcomed, whether now or in the future and perpetration of violence is not tolerated.

**“ WE CAN BUILD A MORE  
INCLUSIVE, RESPONSIVE,  
AND RESILIENT COMMUNITY  
TO STOP VIOLENCE  
BEFORE IT STARTS. ”**